

'Nannayya Restaurant' in Hyderabad promises a unique Telugu dining experience

Hyderabad: Imagine biting into a crispy, golden dosa perfectly paired with ghee karam and sambar or indulging in the rich flavour of ghee avakaya mudda pappu rice. As you await to start your day with everyday chores and tiresome work, how about some hot filter coffee blessing your taste buds with its flavour!

Positioning itself as the first-of-its-kind Telugu Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) in India, Nannayya Restaurant at Kavuri Hills in the city, promises this and more with its authentic menu that brings the taste of home-cooked food to the busy urban lifestyle. Named after the legendary Adi Kavi Nannayya Bhattu, the first poet in Telugu literature, the restaurant honours the cultural and culinary heritage of the Telugu-speaking regions. This tribute is evident not only in the name but also in recreating traditional recipes passed down through generations. Here, the diners can experience classic dishes like pesarattu, upma, pongal, and vada served in delicious combinations that highlight the essence of Telugu cuisine.

Founded by four college friends and food enthusiasts, Nannayya Restaurant aims to offer a unique dining experience where every meal feels like a homecoming. Their menu features a variety of tiffins, pre-mixed rice dishes, and freshly made beverages. From the simplicity of idis in ghee karam to the seasonal delight of puri with aamras, every dish is crafted to bring



comfort and satisfaction to the customers, the eatery says. Siddharth, one of the founding partners, said, "We want to serve healthy, homely Telugu food in a QSR set-

ting. We believe our quality, our special recipes, and taste keep us ahead in the emerging food space." Nannayya with its breakfast, lunch, high tea, and dinner, of-

fers transparency to the customers and ensures healthy and clean food. "This is your safe zone as far as eating out is concerned," says Siddharth.

CSE, allied branches become most preferred engineering courses in Telangana this season



Hyderabad: In the ever-evolving engineering education and IT industry in the State, one trend stands out prominently this

admission season – Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), and its allied

branches. The latest admission intake in various undergraduate engineering programmes reveal that a substantial preference has been allotted to CSE and its allied branches by the managements.

As for the academic year 2024-25, 59.69 per cent out of 70,307 seats in 173 engineering colleges are available in the CSE and its allied branches for admissions via the TG EAPCET 2024 first phase admission counselling. At 21,599, the highest number of seats is in the CSE followed by 11,196 in CSE AI and ML, and 6,516 seats in CSE Data Science. Overall, this year, there are 41,968 seats in the CSE and its allied programmes. However, seats in

the CSE programmes have gone up at the expense of the core engineering branches like the Civil and Mechanical engineering. Given the demand among students for seats in the CSE and its allied branches, several private college managements converted their seats in core engineering branches to CSE. For instance, if a private engineering college has 60 seats in the Civil branch, the management requested the university concerned to reduce the intake from 60 to 30 seats in the Civil branch and enhance such a reduced number of seats in the CSE. As a result, the number of seats in the CSE and its allied branches has increased at the cost of core engineering programmes. This time, Electronics and Communication Engineering, which is one of the core engineering branches, has 10,398 seats, a 14 per cent of the total intake. Similarly, there are only 4,202 seats on offer in the electrical and electronics engineering programme. There are only 3,231 seats in Civil Engineering and 2,979 in Mechanical Engineering for the academic year 2024-25.

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Central Travancore a sitting duck for avian flu

It was just another day for Abraham Ouseph, who had taken his ducks to the Vilakkupadam paddy polder for foraging as usual. Ouseph hails from Champakkulam grama panchayat and owns no land at Vilakkupadam, which is located in the nearby Edathua panchayat. The places are in the Kuttanad region of Kerala's Alappuzha district. The field was just coming out of a successful paddy harvest in March. As he was walking amidst his 7,500 ducks, all voraciously foraging in the fields, a few of them started appearing enervated and dying. "My birds were over 60-days old and looked healthy. They suddenly fell ill. Around 3,000 birds perished within days," says Ouseph, a duck farmer for over two decades. It was the second week of April. Around the same time, ducks owned by two other farmers in Cheruthana panchayat began dying with similar symptoms. The farmers promptly informed the Animal Husbandry department (AHD), and samples of the deceased birds were sent to the National Institute of High-Security Animal Disease (NIHSAD), Bhopal, for analyses, which confirmed another outbreak of bird flu in the region on April 17.

Three days later, members of rapid response teams (RRTs) culled the remaining ducks of the three farmers and other domesticated birds within one-km radius of the hotspots and burnt the carcasses as part of containment measures. In the following weeks, avian influenza spread to several places in Kuttanad, across Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, and Kottayam districts, and beyond. This is the latest bird flu outbreak in the region, and has caused the death of 34,851 birds in three districts. Additionally, 1,70,911 birds, mostly ducks and chickens, have been culled as part of containment measures. Previously, five outbreaks have been reported in the Kuttanad area. The first bout of bird flu in the region was reported in ducks in 2014 followed by another outbreak in 2016. After a lull, avian flu hit the region thrice between January 2021 and October 2022. Collectively, bird flu has resulted in the death and culling of over 13 lakh birds. Although avian flu was reported in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts in recent years, there were no recurring outbreaks like in Kuttanad. Unlike the previous outbreaks that primarily impacted poultry such as ducks, chickens, and quail in Kuttanad, the present episode of avian flu (H5N1) throws a wrench into the equation with several species of free-flying birds getting infected, notably outside the region. Crows, herons, kites, pigeons, and even peahen have tested positive, raising concerns about a wider spread caused by a virulent mutation of the virus, challenges in curbing the spread, and a possible jump to humans.

At Kayippuram in Muhamma grama panchayat in Cherthala taluk, Alappuzha, the sky is overcast with monsoon clouds. With the arrival of the monsoon rains, Premraj C.K., who runs a small juice shop, sits unoccupied. "We are scared of crows nowadays," says Premraj adding that

though Kuttanad has witnessed bird flu outbreaks quite a few times, this is the first time the disease has been reported in his village. Avian flu in crows was confirmed for the first time in Kerala at Kayippuram on June 13. A few crows were found dead by residents near Kayippuram Service Cooperative Bank by the side of the Muhamma-Pathiramanal island road. "We initially thought the birds perished from electrocution. Soon more crows in the area started to look languid and die, raising suspicion. We informed the AHD and samples were tested at NIHSAD, which confirmed bird flu," says C.D. Viswanathan, local ward member. Bird deaths at Kayippuram were followed by more bird deaths across the wider region caused by the virus. According to a scientist at a lab under the AHD, the free-flying inland birds might have been dormant carriers of the virus from an earlier stage now causing bird deaths. However, as of now, most of the observed bird deaths happened in human-populated areas, not in the wild, he says.

K.E. Carmel-Mathaji Road leads to a desolate poultry farm in Ward 10 of Kanjikuzhy grama panchayat, which borders Muhamma. Until recently, the farm housed around 2,000 chickens. Now, only a few feeding bowls and some equipment remain with bleaching powder sprinkled all over. The farm, which stands in a few cents of land, is situated in a thickly populated area and is close to its owner's house. The birds at the farm began to die around the same time as the crows perished at Kayippuram, leading to confirmation of the disease on June 13. A small number of workers are engaged in disinfecting the farm. "We have a busy schedule nowadays. After this, we are heading to other bird flu epicentres in the region," says one worker. The mandatory 10-day quarantine for workers and members of the RRTs is causing a shortage of hands to handle the culling in the region. Precautions taken. The latest outbreak has resulted in 37 avian flu epicentres in the three districts. In Alappuzha alone, there are 29 epicentres. With avian flu spreading more rapidly, experts say there are greater chances of humans catching the disease. H5N1 has high pathogenicity. Though the World Health Organization considers the public health risk from bird flu to be low, there have been around 889 cases of H5N1 infections in humans in the past two decades, of which 463 patients succumbed to the disease in different countries. "Avian influenza poses a potential threat to human beings due to two reasons: its ability to mutate rapidly and its propensity to acquire genes from viruses infecting other species such as humans. Sporadic bird flu infections have been reported in humans, but no human-to-human transmission has been reported so far," says Sairu Philip, professor and head, Department of Community Medicine, Government Medical College Hospital, Kottayam. She says that if the virus acquires the capability of human-to-human transmission it can be dangerous. "The risk of such a situation increases if the virus is allowed to circulate freely and no control



measures are initiated. The important thing is to detect and contain them early with concerted efforts while propagating preventive measures by community participation." In light of the outbreak, a standard operating procedure issued by the State Health and Family Welfare department warns that "having unprotected exposure to any infected animal or to an environment in which infected birds or other animals are or have been present can pose a risk of infection" to humans. Unprotected means not wearing personal protective equipment for protection of respiratory system or the eyes. The SOP recommends the public avoid unprotected contact with sick or dead birds or with materials contaminated by birds suspected of infection. Besides tightening surveillance and taking preventive measures, the Health department has set up an isolation ward with an intensive care unit and ventilator facilities at the Government Medical College Hospital, Alappuzha. "At present, no human H5N1 case has been reported here. But we remain vigilant. As early detection of the disease, isolation, and treatment are important, we are collecting throat swab specimens from people, especially those susceptible to catching the disease, such as those involved in bird culling operations and poultry farmers, and testing them for avian influenza," says Jamuna Varghese, District Medical Officer, Alappuzha.

Until recently, the virus only affected poultry, so the AHD relied on mass culling of affected flocks and domesticated birds within a kilometre radius of the epicentres to contain the spread. With the disease now confirmed in wild birds, AHD officials say the situation has drastically changed, but the present action plan for a bird flu outbreak does not recommend culling wild birds. "We are focussed on preventing the spread of a virus with pandemic potential. The public can contribute by not dumping waste, including kitchen waste and other rubbish, in public areas which attracts crows and other birds, leading to the spread of the disease," says an AHD official. The official says although the virus has jumped from birds to other mammals in different countries, no such incident has been reported in Kerala. Farms bear the brunt

A constant cacophony of quacks filled

the air at the Government Duck Farm, Niranom, in Pathanamthitta, bordering Alappuzha, until mid-May. Now it looks deserted as the outbreak has resulted in the death and culling of the entire stock of around 4,000 birds. It has left Snow White, a duck breed developed by the farm, on the verge of extinction. "Apart from distributing the birds to a few farmers, Snow White was stocked only at the Niranom farm. The entire Snow White population at the farm, along with Chara and Chembally (two local breeds), either perished or were culled following the outbreak. We now hope to collect Snow White or its eggs from farmers and start restocking at the farm once it reopens. In the case of Chara and Chembally, they are available at other institutions," says Harikumar J., District AHD officer, Pathanamthitta. The State government has constituted an 18-member expert team to study the outbreak. "One way to deal with repeated outbreaks is to impose a temporary ban on poultry farming in Alappuzha. But we cannot take such a decision in a hurry. Let the expert committee submit its interim report. The priority right now is to prevent the disease from affecting humans," says Animal Husbandry Minister J. Chinchurani.

Kuttanad, a below-sea-level region defined by Vembanad Lake, rivers, canals, and swathes of paddy fields, is visited by large flocks of migratory birds, but experts say there is no conclusive evidence yet that the source of infection was the winged visitors. They point out the latest outbreak began after the end of the bird migratory season. According to an AHD official, the viral clade spreading in the region is a new one. "The same clade caused an outbreak in the U.S. recently, which has affected cattle there. There is a possibility that migratory birds transmitted the infection to local birds here, and ducks got the virus from them at a later stage," says the official. Over the years, government departments and institutions collected hundreds of samples of migratory birds and tested them, but nothing suspicious was detected. "As part of a research project conducted at the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, a few hundred samples from migratory and wild birds from across Kerala were collected during 2019-20 and tested for avian influenza virus.

River opens its first store in Hyderabad



River, a Bengaluru based EV manufacturer, has launched its first store in the city of Nizams. The River Store is conceived and designed to provide customers a first-hand view into all River offerings including Indie, accessories and merchandise. Spanning an area of 1000 sq. ft., the store in Kukatpally is launched in collaboration with Sri Rajarajeshwara EV Mobility.

The brand continued its tradition of launching stores with multiple customer deliveries in Hyderabad. The store in Kukatpally showcases the brand's newly defined aesthetics that incorporates 'flow lines,' pebbles, and other organic shapes that evoke the essence of rivers. At its heart is a meticulously crafted habitat against which Indie is featured, illustrating how the scooter can be integrated into daily life. The narrative aligns with River's ethos, taking people from where they are to where they want to be. Designed to be welcoming and vibrant, the store offers exclusive experiences for both walk-in and delivery customers, ensuring every customer feels attended to and cared for. Here, River's brand values truly come to life.

River plans to expand to cities like Chennai, Kochi, Coimbatore, Trivandrum, Ahmedabad, Surat, Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur, in the next few months. By year-end, the brand plans to be present in 50+ cities in India.

Aravind Mani, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, "After the success of our flagship store in Bengaluru, we're excited to launch in Hyderabad. The demand for electric scooters is high in Telangana, the initial pre-orders from Hyderabad is a testament to that. Our goal is to establish River Indie as a distinctive vehicle in the region,

offering both style and convenience together. Looking ahead, we plan to expand to over 100 cities in the next two years, prioritizing exceptional customer experience."

The Indie is priced at INR 1,38,000 (ex-showroom, Hyderabad). Customers can visit the store and take test rides,

browse through the merchandise or purchase an Indie. Customers can also visit www.rideriver.in and book test rides or purchase an Indie, at their own convenience. The River Store Kukatpally is located at Flat No. 12-6-19/3/2/NR, Y, Junction, Besire Amor Hospital, Kukatpally, Hyderabad, Medchal Malkajigiri, Telangana.

67 new cases of Zika virus are detected across India out of which about 2 are reported from Telangana State

Hyderabad: Despite multiple Indian states in the last few weeks reporting Zika positive cases and the fact that Telangana State too had detected Zika positive cases a few years ago, the State health department is yet to take firm public health measures to access its endemicity (locally) and possible risks on pregnant women, as Zika virus is known to cause neurological birth defects among babies. It is a fact that Telangana State is among several Indian states to report Zika positive cases in 2022-21, during the height of Covid-19 pandemic.

In fact, study by researchers from In-

dian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), in which Gandhi Hospital, Secunderabad was also involved, a total of nearly 67 new cases of Zika virus were detected across India out of which about 2 were reported from Telangana State.

There is likelihood that Zika virus, like dengue and chikungunya, could have become endemic, senior public health officials, familiar with ICMR findings in Telangana State, point out. Since Zika and dengue pathogens are transmitted through Aedes mosquito, there is likelihood that a lot of Zika infections might be going unnoticed or undiagnosed in Telangana

State. There is a significant overlap of symptoms of Zika and dengue pathogens, which makes it challenging for the health care system to differentiate the two.

The fear among public health experts is that many of the Zika positive cases, which have been mild this year, are going unnoticed/under reported but they could probably have long term implications in pregnant women and infants. Zika diagnostics and virus transmission. At present, the Telangana State health department is poorly equipped to undertake a massive surveillance drive, as attempts have not been made to acquire Zika diagnostic kits.

JSW MG Motor India and Shell India partner to strengthen the EV charging infrastructure

JSW MG Motor India today announced a strategic collaboration with Shell India Markets Private Limited (SIMPL) to enhance public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) across India. JSW MG Motor India customers will be able to leverage Shell's wide fuel station network across the country for a superior vehicle charging experience. As per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), Shell India will deploy CCS 50kW and 60kW DC fast chargers at various locations throughout India, bolstering the EV charging network and facilitating long-distance travel for EV users. These chargers will be accessible to MG customers via the MyMG App and Shell's network discovery tool, ensuring ease of use and convenience.

Gaurav Gupta, Chief Growth Officer, JSW MG Motor India, said "As India's second-largest EV manufacturer, we aim to enhance the electric vehicle (EV) ownership experience for our customers. Our partnership with Shell India highlights our shared commitment to sustainable mobility and will help accelerate EV adoption across the country. The expansion of infrastructure will make EV fast charging more convenient, accessible and enable EV customers to plan hassle-free long-distance journeys."

Shell EV Recharge locations provide reliable and ultra-fast charging, with a 98%-99% charger uptime. These locations also offer convenient retail, including fresh food and beverage options. All these factors help enhance the overall customer experience and provide added value and convenience.

Commenting on this partnership, Sanjay Varkey, Director, Shell India Markets Private Limited, said, "Shell India is



committed to enhancing the EV charging experience by offering integrated solutions that prioritize convenience, safety, and sustainability. Our dedication to using 100% certified renewable power combined with our ultra-fast and reliable chargers ensures that our customers enjoy a sustainable, hassle-free, and efficient charging experience. Our strategic partnership with JSW MG Motor India aims to promote the widespread adoption of electric vehicles in the country by leveraging digital integration

and customer-centric initiatives." JSW MG Motor India has been working on the EV ecosystem well before the launch of the MG ZS EV – India's First Pure Electric Internet SUV.

The company has partners working collaboratively on battery recycle and battery second life management and has set up multi-step charging systems with AC chargers and DC fast chargers in residential communities and showrooms. It also provides a 6-way charging ecosystem to

customers, which includes a free-of-cost AC fast-charger (installed at the customer's home/office), an extended charging network, a plug-and-charge cable onboard, charge-on-the-go with roadside assistance, and community chargers.

The company has installed around 500 chargers in 500 days in residential and communities across India, and a total network of over 15,000 charging touchpoints nationwide, including public and home chargers.

Hyderabad cricket gets its first woman curator

Hyderabad: Praneesha Gorentla made history in the annals of the Hyderabad Cricket Association when she became the first woman curator. She was given the official letter as an assistant curator by HCA secretary R Devraj. "It is a huge boost to my career as I want to be a certified curator of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)," said 29-year-old Praneesha. In India there are now only two BCCI women curators – one from Karnataka and other from Vidarbha.

Starting her career as an all-rounder, Praneesha represented the Hyderabad senior team. "I was an opening bat and opening bowler before injury to her ankle cut short my career as a cricketer," said Praneesha who once scored 52 off 32 balls against Tamil Nadu in an under-19 cricket tournament.

Though the injury broke her heart, it did not stop her passion for the game. "The injury in 2017 was a setback of sorts. I had to take a break from the game. This was the time when my father (Vincent Vijay) was transferred to Warangal. As injury

stopped me from playing the game, I took interest in becoming a curator as I thought it was an interesting subject. I was aware that a very few women have ventured to become a curator. I began to look for online and found that Mumbai Cricket Association had a website where I could learn about art of making wickets."

Encouraged by her father, Praneesha took land for a lease in Karunapuram to start a turf wicket ground in Warangal. "It was a big challenge. There were hardly any turf wickets in Warangal and I wanted the district boys/girls to play on these types of wickets before playing on turf wickets in Hyderabad. It was a struggle initially as I had to find the right mix for a good wicket. A few matches were also played but unfortunately the Covid in 2019-20 shattered my plans. It was a big blow and I suffered loss too."

With her parents, who are Central Government employees, again transferred back to Hyderabad, Praneesha approached the HCA officials to be part of the ground staff this year. Seeing her love for the curator's job, former Indian captain



Purnima Rau and Archana, proposed Praneesha' name to HCA whose president Jagan Mohan Rao and Devraj took her into the fold in January this year. "I was lucky to have an experienced curator like YL Chandrasekhar. I'm learning the intricacies of making the wickets and about the out-

field," said Praneesha, whose first big experience was during the India-England first Test at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium. She was prominently seen during the IPL matches. "She has a lot of interest and I like her attitude for hard work," said Jagan Mohan Rao.

Miss Grand India Praachi Nagpal inaugurates 'Sutraa' exhibition at Taj Krishna



Hyderabad: Sutraa – A Indian Fashion Lifestyle 3-Day Exhibition was Inaugurated by Miss Grand India 2022 and Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka State director of Miss Universe Praachi Nagpal at Taj Krishna, Banjara Hills.

Praachi said platforms such as this are required to reach out to women looking for well-designed designer saris, clothes for Women, and jewellery, designer clutches. The show will be on till July 12 from 10 am to 9 pm. Organizer Umesh said,

” Sutraa is bringing its Rakhi Teej exclusive Sutraa Exhibition to the city for three days till July 12. It showcase exclusive fashion wear, festive wear, festive special collection, lifestyle and designer wear, jewellery, accessories and

more.” Showcasing more than 100 designers from across the country, the show will be displaying designer clothes for women, kids and men, some bespoke jewellery, handcrafted shoes, designer clutches, beautiful hair accessories and home decor.

PhonePe's Payment Gateway Hosts Knowledge Summit in Hyderabad

PhonePe, India's leading digital payments platform, successfully hosted its Payment Gateway knowledge summit in Hyderabad, combining two flagship events - Confluence and Connect 2024. The summit, aimed at empowering SMEs and educating partners, brought together industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and technology experts for a day of learning and networking. PhonePe PG Confluence, designed for web developers, IT solution strategists, and ERP consultants, provided insights into the PhonePe PG Partner Program. Participants learned about product offerings and how to build and earn through this rewarding affiliate program.

PhonePe PG Connect 2024 focused on e-commerce and D2C brands, offering business owners the opportunity to engage with PhonePe leaders and learn about the PhonePe Payment Gateway. The event

hosted over 50 e-commerce and D2C brand owners, including Srideep Kesavan, CEO of Heritage Foods. Ankit Gaur, Head of PhonePe's Payment Gateway & Online Merchants, commented on the event's success and said: "By combining Confluence and Connect, we've created a unique platform that fosters cross-industry collaboration and knowledge sharing. This format allows us to address the needs of both our partners and merchants, while also gaining valuable insights to enhance our products and services.

The enthusiastic participation we've seen in Hyderabad, a city rapidly emerging as a startup powerhouse with quality resources, reaffirms our commitment to empowering SMEs and supporting India's digital growth story."

Speaking at Connect, Srideep Kesavan, CEO, Heritage Foods said,



"Today's businesses have multiple resources at hand to become successful. While each business problem may have a unique solution, it is extremely essential to understand what their consumers want. Legacy businesses today are heavily using data to understand customer needs. Events like Connect play an important role for growing businesses to understand the

intersection at which their businesses function, and align themselves with upcoming trends." The summit highlighted Hyderabad's growing importance in India's startup ecosystem, which now boasts over 4,300 tech startups. It also provided a platform for businesses to learn about PhonePe's innovative payment solutions and also network with industry peers.

Prison reforms in Telangana: Locked in a limbo

Every day as dusk fell, Sheelam Shetti Venkata Ramana would feel a knot of anxiety tighten in his stomach. His father, Nageshwar Rao, an infamous figure in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, for his criminal record, would set him a daily challenge — “arrange ₹100 by evening” — before disappearing from their home. Terrified of his father’s wrath, the 14-year-old turned to petty theft, picking pockets to meet the demand. Now, 36 years later, Ramana is a wanted offender and a regular face in State prisons. In May this year, the Rachakonda police in Hyderabad apprehended him, following a 42-day round-the-clock mission, for his involvement in seven new cases, adding to his staggering tally of over 250 property offences across the two Telugu States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Ramana’s arrest has highlighted a major crisis in Indian jails: the urgent need for effective reformation and rehabilitation of criminals.

In early 2000s in Hyderabad, then part of united Andhra Pradesh, another 14-year-old, Varun Varma (name changed to protect identity), chose a path influenced by his uncle, a history sheeter. His first encounter with the prison system was when the police apprehended him, along with about 30 others, for involvement in communal violence in Amberpet area of the city. Until 2001, Varun had a conventional upbringing in Hyderabad. His father, a renowned realtor at the time, had just gotten his ticket into the world of politics. With his father’s busy schedule and confusion over choosing a career path upon reaching class 10, Varun found inspiration in his uncle. “People in my area always looked up to him for all sorts of settlements. I admired his lifestyle and skills, but couldn’t beat people up unless I was intoxicated,” Varun recalls.

Now 41, Varun has spent over 15 years behind the bars for offences including murder, assault, extortion, kidnapping, and drug trafficking. By his own admission, his time in prison exposed him to drugs and led him deeper into criminal activities, earning him the moniker ‘Chinna Bhai’, a close associate of slain gangster Nayeem. The dark prison barrack, packed with about 14 inmates, became his sanctuary. “I grew so fond of the environs that I did not want to go home anymore. Inside, there were all grades of criminals — thieves, murderers, drug lords, and even those with political ties. It was within those walls that I was introduced to drugs and became addicted to it. In jail, we formed networks and assigned each other ‘jobs’,” he says, sharing the names of a few fellow inmates who hired him for settlements outside the jail. The man, standing at about 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighing 85 kilograms, was reduced to just 35 kilograms during his battle with drug addiction. “My life revolved around drugs and deals. I drifted away from my family, whom I loved dearly. Eventually, I was dead to them,” he adds. Varun attempted to take his own life thrice. “A friend and I had made a pact to end our lives. The same night, I found his body hanging in the washroom. It was then

that I felt utterly alone in this world and decided to end my own life the following day,” he recalls. That incident marked a turning point in his life. Unlike Ramana, Varun’s path diverged dramatically from his troubled past. Today, he is a trained psychologist, volunteering as a counsellor for inmates at Telangana’s Chanchalguda Central Prison. Varun is also preparing to pursue postdoctoral studies. After serving nearly three years at a global technology firm, he forayed into entrepreneurship by opening a hotel in Dilsukhnagar area of Hyderabad and is now entering the city’s competitive real estate market. Similar is the story of Munna Kumar Upadhyay, 41, who hails from Bihar and was convicted for murder. He is one of the 213 inmates, including lifers, who were released from Cherlapalli jail on grounds of good behaviour on July 3. He had been holding counselling sessions for his fellow prisoners during the latter part of his 22-year jail stint under Telangana Prison Department’s programme, Unnati. Unnati is run by Beena Chintalapuri, a retired psychology professor of Hyderabad’s Osmania University who informally conducts cognitive and behavioral skill-based programmes in jails. She has a team of volunteers, most of them released prisoners. Munna now plans to launch a disinfectant-making business back home. Varun credits his transformation from ‘Chinna Bhai’ to his current self to the targeted counselling he received while incarcerated. “Without the counselling, I wouldn’t be alive today. They gave me purpose. As I began leading sessions for other inmates, I realised I had to turn my life around for good,” he emphasises, stressing the need for consistent mental health support for those undergoing imprisonment. In the recent past, there have been several cases of theft, murder and even a recent child-selling racket that have been busted in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. These cases involved repeat offenders who forged friendships in jail and persisted in criminal activities upon release. “More than just the number of cases, the real challenge lies in rehabilitating the minds of criminals, especially repeat offenders, to convince them to not tread the same path again,” says J. Srinivas, Detective Inspector with the Rachakonda police investigating Ramana’s case. “Special focus on psychological counselling and involving them in meaningful prison activities are the steps forward,” he adds.

As per the latest Prison Statistics India report, a total of 2,471 convicts, accounting for 1.9% of the total, were habitual offenders across Indian jails in 2022. Telangana had the second highest number of repeat offenders, with 243 cases (2.6%) out of 9,527 convicts, after Uttar Pradesh with 851 cases, underscoring major concerns. “Indian jails are obsessed with detention, which is only 33% of what they are meant for. The remaining 66%, focused on reformation and rehabilitation, is often neglected or superficially addressed,” says V.K. Singh, founder of the Prison World Organisation and former di-



rector-general of Telangana Prisons, highlighting concerns that many repeat offenders might not even be accounted for. “The correctional approach is missing in jails. While facilities might be present, prisoners are only seen as criminals and very little is being done to address their psychological challenges,” says Kondaveeti Satyavati, Project Director of Hyderabad-based Bhumika Foundation, a women support organisation which also works towards suicide prevention by counselling jail inmates. Psychological counselling has been identified as the single most powerful means to bring down the rate of re-commitment of prisoners into prisons. In the 245th report on Indian prisons presented in the Raja Sabha in September 2023, the standing committee has mandated counselling programmes to be run across all Indian prisons to reform first-time offenders, citing the example of Unnati programme. However, after making a significant mark within a short span, such programmes hit a speed bump. At the heart of reforms mental health awareness has gained traction in recent years, especially on social media. But psychologists say it is yet to make a significant impact in Indian prisons, where it is most needed. When incarcerated, the task of dealing with one’s emotional and mental challenges is largely left to individuals already trying to wrap their heads around the ‘new normal’ of their lives, says Purnima Nagaraja, a mental health professional and therapist who has also closely worked with women prisoners in Chanchalguda Central jail in Hyderabad.

Unable to deal with it, many even end their lives. The trend is underscored by the alarming numbers in the latest Prison Statistics report according to which 660 of the 817 unnatural deaths (80.78%) in Indian prisons were suicides. Telangana prisons alone have seen 847 suicides in the past five years. Roshni, a suicide prevention counselling trust, has counselled for seven years about 20 prisoners per month who attempted suicide. That puts the figure at more than 1,500. “Often undertrial prisoners are more vulnerable. They exhibit depression and suicidal tendencies owing to the uncertainty looming over them,” says

Swarna Raju, director of Roshni helpline. “Critical withdrawal symptoms, including violence in cases of prisoners who are addicted to alcohol or drugs, or suffer from chronic depression, anxiety disorder and anger issues are the prominent concerns among prisoners,” explains K. Santhipriya, a counsellor with Bhumika, who has counselled at least 3,500 prisoners over the past five years. Meanwhile, lack of legal knowledge, limited family meetings and inconsistent mental health support are other factors that can even lead to serious and long-term mental health issues, experts agree. Post-release life a double-edged sword. Freedom after jail time comes at a huge cost. Ex-prisoners face family rejection, stigma, unequal professional opportunities, and the struggle to reintegrate into a fast-paced world, explains Satyavati. Without timely support, many run the risk of reverting to their former ways. Some of them experience nightmares for weeks after release, while others struggle with boarding and balancing themselves in public transport, says Santhipriya. “Many suffer memory issues and find it challenging to use gadgets like phones and laptops. Social media can be particularly difficult for them to handle,” she adds. Both the prison staff and the world outside continue to treat them as ‘criminals’, which hinders their rehabilitation journey. Take the example of 31-year-old Deepika, who spent time in Chanchalguda Women’s Prison from 2019-2020 on theft charges, and struggled to rebuild her life after release. “Even in jail, I worried about my future. My family did not accept me. When I visit home, they refuse to talk to me due to societal pressure. Moreover, no one was willing to give me a job,” she shares. She now works as a warden at a shelter home in Beeramguda, Hyderabad. Similarly, 23-year-old Leelavathi faced rejection from her family and villagers after two weeklong stints in prison for attacking a fellow worker at a construction site. One of the seven daughters of her parents and the family’s breadwinner, she now dresses like a man to navigate the male-dominated world of autorickshaw drivers. Challenges aplenty. Overcrowding remains a major challenge in prison administration.

Faceless perpetrators make online space unsafe for women

The murder of a fan of Kannada actor Darshan has sent shock waves across not just Karnataka but elsewhere as well. But the spotlight on the actor's role in the crime has the focus away from where it all began: the victim, Renukaswamy, was sending obscene messages on social media to Pavithra Gowda, Darshan's alleged partner, which triggered an act of revenge that went terribly wrong. Working under the alias of Goutham K.S., Renukaswamy had sent obscene messages and photos of his private parts to Pavithra. Investigation revealed that he was a habitual offender and had sent similar pictures and messages to many women, especially social media influencers in the Kannada space. This case of harassment is not an isolated incident. Most women active on social media in Bengaluru say they have received inappropriate messages or obscene photos. It's worse when it comes to women who have a public profile or are celebrities. According to Bengaluru City Police data, as many as 47 cases of online sexual abuse have been booked this year alone. Last year, it was 156, and in 2022, the number was 28.

As in the case with Pavithra, many such cases never reach the police since victims find the task of taking the legal route too daunting. Those who do, don't always get justice, given the myriad challenges such crimes pose to law enforcement agencies. A 28-year-old Bengaluru resident was shaken upon learning that her pictures were being misused by someone who had created fake accounts on Instagram and Facebook. According to the First Information Report filed in the Central Cybercrime, Economic Offences, Narcotics (CEN) police station, the perpetrator had created two fake accounts on Instagram and two fake accounts on Facebook using the woman's pictures. The culprit was sending posts to the public and friends of the complainant that for ₹100, they could make obscene video calls to her. A friend of hers noticed the post and made the payment to the specified number, only to be blocked by the perpetrator. This was then brought to the attention of the woman, which led her to complain to the cyber police. Investigation is underway in the case. Advent of internet and smartphones While reporting of online sexual harassment has increased now due to increased awareness, these cases go way back to the time of the advent of the internet and smartphones. Bhavana Belagere, a journalist and contestant on a popular reality show, received obscene messages for 20 days in a row on social media. "Around six years ago, I started receiving nude photographs on Facebook from a man's account. He was also sending vulgar messages and asking me to send my nude pictures. I ignored him for 20 days, but it continued and even the frequency of messages increased. Then I complained to Subramanyapura police station," Bhavana said. The police found the perpetrator, a man from Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, who was using a fake account. "When they asked what steps I wanted to take, I told them to warn him and leave it at that. I know I could have blocked him (instead of going to the police), but I wanted to take some action, and hence, lodged the complaint," Bhavana added. This com-

plaint, however, did not put an end to such messages. "Even now, I get vulgar comments and thousands of dirty messages. Initially, it used to frustrate and irritate me, and I could not ignore it. But now, I have understood that everyone who is in the spotlight goes through these things."

Apart from obscene messages, trolling, vulgar comments and phone calls with an intent to abuse are among the different ways women are harassed in the digital space. What is alarming is there is no pattern or specific criteria for perpetrators to attack women in the virtual world. Surprisingly, even the women working in Namma 112, Bengaluru Police's emergency response service, are not spared. A woman in her late 20s, who was among the phone operators who work in Namma 112 (police have outsourced the call centre to a private firm), said she gets at least two crank calls every day from men. "From using abusive language to saying 'I love you' on the phone, the callers say all sorts of things. Some invite us to go for lunch with them. Some call just to listen to a woman's voice. In fact, male colleagues say some callers insist on speaking with women. We cannot permanently block them either, as we are an emergency response team," she said. While urban women often brave such calls, those coming from rural backgrounds or socio-economically backward families are affected the most. "Sometimes, they start crying and are in a bad mood throughout the day," the woman said. What leads to online harassment

In the Renukaswamy case, he was reportedly upset that Pavithra was causing what he felt was a rift in Darshan's marital life. In a few other cases, especially those involving social media influencers and public figures, harassment begins with moral policing. A woman posting photos with male friends, seen consuming alcohol, or sporting a bikini are easy targets for trolling and harassment. "When society sees women, be it on any platform or field, there is a mentality to judge them and form opinions about their character. With social media, it has become even easier to gain access and moral-police women. As a society, we need to come out of the mindset that makes judgements about women's characters," said K.S. Vimala of All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA). Elaborating on how access has become easier now, Chetana Thirthahalli, a women's activist, said, "Earlier, harassment used to take place in other spaces. But now, it has shifted to the online space. Earlier, men used to pull women's hair or resort to catcalls. But it takes courage to bully someone face to face. In the virtual space, they can do it anonymously using fake accounts. Easy accessibility is what has changed in recent years. "I have been seeing cases of cyber harassment since 2010. Now, because more people have access to the internet and more people are using it, we are seeing more cases," says Thirthahalli, who helps women navigate the problem of cyber harassment. She advises women to report the crimes to the cybercrime police, especially if it begins to affect their daily lives. "The third thing would be to speak out and call them out by tag-



ging their profiles. Even in cases where a woman might have responded to such messages in a weak moment, but it has turned into harassment, it is better to call them out instead of hiding it and suffering." She stressed that such incidents should not lead to women losing their social space. "We do not have to stop posting photos or writing on social media. It is important to speak up, act, and claim our space. The support of parents and family members is essential in such instances." Mental health professionals are seeing more women facing harassment online. Juhi Pandey, psychologist at the Mpower Helpline, said, "We get 15 to 20 calls every week on our helpline from all over the country from women who are mentally affected by online harassment." Women who go through harassment often exhibit signs of guilt, shame, low self-esteem, anxiety, sleep disturbances, social isolation, and even self-harm. "Depending on the severity of their conditions, we decide if they need psychotherapy alone or medication with therapy," Pandey said. On what drives people to harass others on social media, she said, "These are people who usually suffer from issues like sadism and narcissism, or have a history of substance abuse or have anger issues. Social media provides them an anonymous, non-confrontational space to express their desires." Acknowledging that the number of reported cases is far fewer when compared to actual incidents of

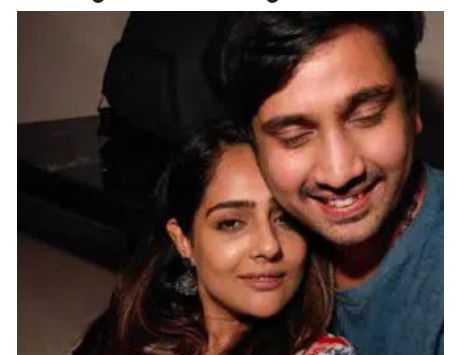
online sexual harassment, experts say this is because many women feel that cybercrimes are not taken seriously, even in dedicated police stations.

"It is safer to lodge complaints under criminal laws in law-and-order police stations rather than reporting them as cybercrimes. It is not the department's problem. It is a problem with the system where the concept that women can get harassed online is yet to sink in," Thirthahalli said. While there were some expectations that there might be newer laws to deal with online harassment in the newly introduced Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, there have been no significant changes in this regard. "Online harassment continues to fall under cyber laws. The laws have not changed much. It is just that the language is slightly different," said Mirza Faizan Assad, advocate of Legal Tree Law Firm, which specialises in cyber laws. "The conviction rate in these cases is very low. As the data is all online, it can be deleted at any time. By the time the police gain access to it, it might already be late. There is a delay in getting information from sites like Facebook or X," Mirza pointed out. B. Dayananda, Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru, said, "We have made it possible for citizens to lodge cybercrime complaints not just in cybercrime police stations, but also in law-and-order stations, and even online. We follow all protocols as laid out by the law and investigate the cases based on the FIRs."

Complaint against Tollywood actors Raj Tarun, Malvi Malhotra for threatening, cheating woman

Hyderabad: A complaint has been lodged at Narsingi police station against Telugu actor, Raj Tarun and actress Malvi Malhotra, for allegedly harassing and threatening a woman Lavanya, who claimed to be in a live-in relationship with the actor.

The woman in her complaint to the police alleged that Raj Tarun was in a relationship with her for the last 11 years and both of them lived together at a house. "Both of us were planning to get married shortly," she said in the complaint.



Chopra case: Victims and survivors, silenced

The flash of the camera lights up the dark room, revealing a corrugated ceiling and red walls of a structure made of aluminium sheets. She clasps her hands and moves her feet nervously on the bed. Around her are discarded bulbs and, incongruously, new utensils. The camera light shines on her face covered with a red and grey dupatta as she faces a barrage of questions about the assault, allegedly by local Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Tajmul Islam alias JCB. The incident is said to have taken place at a kangaroo court in Chopra block, Uttar Dinajpur district, West Bengal, in the last week of June. A viral video of the incident, running a little over a minute, showed the woman along with a man, Rafiq (name changed), being mercilessly beaten up in a market at a village in Chopra. The crowd, mostly consisting of men, gathered in a circle, watching the fracas, but not intervening to stop the violence. The woman is seen not resisting the attacks, even though she writhed in pain. The duo, allegedly in an extramarital relationship, lay helplessly on the street. Siliguri, West Bengal, The survivor of Chopra violence at her residence, where a couple was beaten up publicly at a kangaroo court by a local Trinamool Leader Photo DEBASISH BHADURIA About 50 km north of Chopra is Fulbari in Jalpaiguri district. Here, on June 29, Sabita Barman, 38, allegedly took her life. She had been in a relationship with a man outside her marriage. Tapas Barman, her husband, says she was beaten up by locals who had gathered outside their home when the couple had tried to return home.

Sabita, who worked as a nursing attendant, had left home for a few days and asked her husband to come and pick her up from her parents' place. "On our way back, locals said she cannot return home like that," says Tapas. "Our neighbours, Swapna and her husband Barjen Adhikari, had threatened to attack and burn down our house if I allowed my wife to enter." Contrary to the claims by the Siliguri Police Commissionerate that "there was no incident of public assault or mob outrage", Tapas points to the place his wife was allegedly assaulted just a few metres away from their home. Four persons, including the Adhikari couple, who are associated with the ruling TMC, have been arrested by the New Jalpaiguri police for abetment to suicide. Days after, Rubina refuses to talk about the violence. Just as the crowd had voyeuristically gathered a week ago, it comes again, this time surrounding her house, even entering the room where mediapersons are gathered. "You do not know who beat you up? The whole State knows who the person is," a reporter persists. The woman is silent. "Are you under any pressure? The person has been arrested. What makes you afraid?" Again, silence. She breaks her silence at a question on whether she required medical help. "They conducted a medical [examination] at Islampur Hospital and gave me some medicines," she says. She does not say whether she is in physical pain or discomfort. Hours before the journalists converged, she had refused to meet Gov-

ernor C.V. Ananda Bose, who had travelled from New Delhi to Bagdogra in Siliguri, about 50 km from Chopra. "The victim wants to be left alone, and I respect her right to do so," the Governor had said. A journalist asks if she would like to meet Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee, who has a strained political relationship with the Governor. Rubina mutters, "Whatever had to happen has happened. Now what?" A police vehicle at the village in Chopra in Uttar Dinajpur where a woman was publicly beaten at a kangaroo court by a local Trinamool Congress Leader. The area remains tense since a video of the incident went viral. A police vehicle at the village in Chopra in Uttar Dinajpur where a woman was publicly beaten at a kangaroo court by a local Trinamool Congress Leader. The area remains tense since a video of the incident went viral. | Photo Credit: DEBASISH BHADURIA couple of days after the incident, she released a video to local journalists saying she had filed a complaint at the local police station against those who had made the video and forwarded it across social media platforms.

At the village in Chopra, while hundreds of residents had gathered to witness the beatings, nobody is now willing to talk about the incident or even say where or when it happened. The women disappear inside their homes when asked about the incident. The men claim they were not around. The air is tense; every outsider is looked at with suspicion. A large police contingent is posted at the local market, next to a mosque, and leaves only after the evening prayers. Chopra is located close to the India-Bangladesh border and tucked away about 20 km from the picturesque landscape of small tea gardens, and pineapple and jute farms. There are no industries in this Muslim-majority area. Men either work in agriculture or migrate to work as labourers in other parts of the country.

Like certain other parts of the State, the region has witnessed political violence. A Communist Party of India (Marxist) worker, Mansur Alam, 23, was killed at Chopra during the panchayat polls held in July last year. Several leaders from the Opposition parties have compared the incident to the alleged atrocities at Sandeshkhali, where people, including a woman, had alleged torture and sexual assault by a local TMC leader, Sheikh Shahjahan, earlier this year. However, unlike Sandeshkhali, where the woman had come out in protest, nobody from Chopra is willing to stand by the victims, speak about the incident, or protest against those who held the kangaroo court. Hours after the video of the attack went viral on June 30, officials at Islampur police district lodged a suo motu case and arrested Islam. The accused has been booked under several charges, including attempt to murder and outraging the modesty of a woman. When Islam was produced before a local court, the public prosecutor said there were 12 cases pending against him, including one in connection with the murder of Mansur. This was not the first time that Islam has held a kangaroo court and



tortured a couple for allegedly having extramarital relations. Videos being circulated on social media show a couple with hands tied, and the accused moving around them with a baton in his hand. However, no person in the video has been identified and nobody has come forward to lodge a police complaint. A day after the video went viral, Hamidul Rahaman, the local TMC legislator, raised questions on the character of Rubina. "The woman also did commit a mistake, leaving her husband and children. She 'became corrupt' and was indulging in activities that society does not permit," the Chopra MLA said, even though he admitted that the 'punishment' was extreme. Uttam, 20, Sabita's older son, says his mother was the family's primary breadwinner, ensuring that her two children secured an education. "It all happened so quickly. She could not take the humiliation of the assault. We took her to the hospital, but could not save her," Tapas says. Jasoda, Sabita's mother-in-law, says the younger son tried to record the assault on his mother, but locals forced her and the boy inside the house. Madan Barman husband of Sabita Barman who died by suicide after being beaten at a local kangaroo court, showing the place where his wife was assaulted. Madan Barman husband of Sabita Barman who died by suicide after being beaten at a local kangaroo court, showing the place where his wife was assaulted. [The neighbourhood in Bakhravita village, not far from New Jalpaiguri railway station, consists primarily of Rajbanshis, a Scheduled Caste community. The houses look better than the ones in Chopra, but the roads have turned into a series of puddles after the monsoon showers. People here are willing to speak, unlike in Chopra, and say what happened to Sabita should not have taken place. An Integrated Child Development Services worker, Protima Das, who grew up in the neighbourhood, says neighbours should stop interfering in other people's lives. "If they feel something is wrong, they should involve the police," she says. Incidents of people taking the law into their own hands are not limited to Chopra and Islampur; they have been reported in several parts of the State. The common thread in all these incidents of mob violence is that the vic-

tims were poor. On June 28, Irshad Alam, 37, a TV mechanic, was beaten to death in Kolkata's Bowbazar area. According to the police, he was tortured with cricket bats and sticks on suspicion of mobile theft at a hostel meant for students of reserved categories. The post-mortem report revealed that he had died of internal bleeding. Fourteen people, mostly students and boarders of Udayan Hostel, located on Nirmal Chunder Street, were arrested. Irshad, who lived in a one-room tenement at the nearby Belgachia slum, has left behind two children, who have barely spoken since their father's death; his wife wants justice. The next day, a similar incident occurred at Bidhannagar on the north-eastern fringes of the city. Prasen Mondal, 22, died after being thrashed by a mob on a similar suspicion of stealing a mobile phone. Three persons were arrested in connection with the case. On June 30, Sourabh Sau, 23, succumbed to injuries at Jhargram district hospital after being beaten up by a mob on June 22, the police said. He was found injured on the road by locals. The victim's family alleged that he had been beaten up and assaulted by a group of men engaged by a contractor. They were allegedly enraged by allegations that Sau had attempted to steal parts of an earth mover parked on the roadside. The allegation against 23-year-old Biswajit Manna from Tarakeswar was that he had stolen ₹50,000 from the house of a local businessman. A group of people dragged him out of his house in the early hours of July 1 and beat him up. After the attackers left, Manna fell unconscious and was declared dead. Municipal Affairs and Urban Development Minister and Mayor of Kolkata Municipal Corporation Firhad Hakim expressed concerns over such attacks and said "mass hysteria can only be countered by mass counselling". Feeling the heat of back-to-back lynchings, the State government announced a compensation of ₹2 lakh for such deaths and a job to a family member of the deceased as a home guard in the State police. "Police authorities have been advised to exercise maximum vigil and take strong lawful actions. All sections of people should also remain vigilant," former Chief Secretary and Adviser to the Chief Minister Alapan Bandyopadhyay said.